

First of all, I would like to thank you for allowing me to speak with you today and for taking the time to listen. Unfortunately I know first hand why Bills 816 and 817 are so important.

I am a member of the Great Lakes Beach and Pier Safety Task Force which was formed in Grand Haven, Michigan. The task force was formed almost immediately after the drowning of my 17 year old son, Andy Fox. We lost Andy September 3, 2003 when he was caught in a Rip Current. Andy had no idea how to break the grip of this deadly current.

I became a member of the task force some two months after the loss of my son. We needed to make these water communities safer and more knowledgeable around the Great Lakes. Our goal was first to get safety devices on the beach and pier. We also wanted signs that explain rip currents and how to escape from them when caught in one.

The day Andy lost his life a by stander had to go a great distance trying to move quickly across the sand to retrieve a life ring. By the time the life ring made its way to the waters edge my son had taken his last breath and disappeared into the waves. This is where he was to remain for 2 ½ days. I wasn't going to leave my son alone at the beach. Andy's family slept on the sand keeping vigil for my youngest child.

When the task force first tried making a safer beach and pier we ran into many obstacles. The biggest being the liabilities factor. We did overcome that issue and there are now 15 brackets holding life rings and ropes on the pier where there were none. Five posts holding life rings, ropes and signs explaining rip currents and how to escape now line the beach some 100 feet from the water's edge.

Now we have a new problem. Just days after the life rings were put into place the first one was stolen. It felt like a personal attack. After all, those rings were there because my son had died.

We lost 22 life rings in 2005 alone. I am deeply saddened that anyone would think of these life saving devices as a souvenir. How would they feel if they had to live with the vision of their loved one in the water pleading as Andy did for help and no one able to help because there is nothing there? No one wants this vision.

The task force has created a DVD for the educational purposes which we have already mailed almost 3000 copies to schools and libraries all over Michigan. We are currently working on a second video for grades K – 5 to help them understand about water safety and hope to have it out by the start of school in the fall. Funding however is always an issue. Education is so vitally important.

My son had just started singing in the choir at school in what would have been his senior year. They were learning a song entitled “ I’ll make the difference” The Grand Haven Chamber Choir of which Andy had been part of asked if they could sing this to him at his funeral. They wanted to do this because it was so fitting, as Andy had made a difference in their lives in 17 short years. Andy’s family is now trying to do just that. We want to make a difference. We need your help to keep our life saving devices where they can help those in desperate situations. Penalties need to be made tougher to ensure people take this very seriously. Please feel free to contact me or any of the task force members for more information or visit our website

[www.respectthepower.org](http://www.respectthepower.org)

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